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Health Inspection Program

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Specialized Food Processes

Dear Restaurateur,

The Health Inspection Program (HIP) wants to share important information with you about specialized food processes such as curing meats and vacuum packaging of foods. Some Maine restaurants are performing these processes now, and others have expressed interest in doing so. There are strict requirements that must be met before performing these processes.

If you are not conducting these specialized food processes then this will be only an informational letter for you.

HACCP Plans

Restaurateurs that chose to perform certain specialized food processes must first develop a detailed process plan called a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan to ensure that specialized food processes are safe. The Maine Food Code requires a HACCP plan because foods prepared by these processes pose a higher health risk and can be contaminated with deadly bacteria called *Listeria monocytogenes* (Listeriosis) or *Clostridium botulinum* (Botulism) which can cause serious illness and death.

HACCP plans will be accepted for only the following specialized food processes:

- Vacuum packaging, cook chill packaging with exception below, sous vide packaging (following required minimum internal cooking temperatures, per the Maine Food Code chapter 3), acidified canned foods, fermenting of vegetables, and cured foods.

Before you develop a HACCP plan, your staff responsible for performing the specialized food process for meat, poultry or seafood must first attend a HACCP training course to become knowledgeable about the process(es) they are proposing to utilize in their business. Here are the contacts for this training:

Seafood: Melissa Libby at 207-581-2788 libby1@maine.edu

Meat and Poultry: Theresa Tilton at 207-942-7396 tilton@maine.edu

Once this course is completed, please submit the certificate of completion to the Department informing us of your intentions before developing the HACCP plan. The development of the HACCP plan is the responsibility of the licensee. I have attached the 2013 Maine Food Code HACCP section along with guidance documents and templates to assist you. They can also be found on our website at maine.gov/healthinspection.

Variances

For some processes a variance will be needed in addition to a HACCP plan. The Maine Food Code defines a variance as a written document issued by the HIP that authorizes a modification or waiver of one or more requirements of the Maine Food Code if, in the opinion of the HIP, a health hazard or nuisance will not result from the modification or waiver.

Variances will be issued for only the following specialized food processes:

- Curing with the addition of nitrites only, acidification of canned foods, fermenting of vegetables, and preparation of sushi.

Due to the complexity of the process and HACCP plan, the Health Inspection Program will **not** approve variances for:

- The fermenting of meats, smoking of foods as a method of food preservation and cook/chill for seafood and fish products.

Please contact me at 207-287-5691 if you have any questions about this information.

Sincerely,

Lisa Silva
Program Manager
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Maine CDC